

# PROTOCOL FOR EXTENDED TECHNIQUES PIANO PERFORMANCE

Prepared by members of the College and University Technicians Committee of the Piano Technicians Guild, in consultation with various pianists and composers.

Extended techniques piano use requires the performer to produce sound by means other than, or in addition to, playing the keys. Techniques employed include strumming, bowing, and/or striking the strings, and sometimes striking wooden parts of the case. This can be done either using fingers and hands or hand held objects. Prepared piano use generally requires adding objects to the string system and other parts of the piano. Extended techniques and prepared use often requires marking parts and strings.

The use of extended techniques has been a source of conflict between pianists, composers, and piano technicians. The purpose of this document is to lay the groundwork for better communication and understanding, recognizing that extended techniques are a legitimate part of musical performance, but that they have the potential to cause damage to the instrument.

We take it for granted that we always strive to provide a composer and/or pianist with a piano of high quality when a piano is used conventionally. It is no less important that a composer and pianist have a suitable instrument to make music using extended techniques. It is not in the best interest of the art to provide inferior pianos for any performance. When at all possible, a piano in very good working order should always be provided for extended techniques use. Most often, that can be a piano routinely used for most concert use, but sometimes it will make sense to substitute a different piano.

We all need to bear in mind that a concert piano is a shared resource. It represents an expensive investment of both money and continual maintenance on the part of the piano technician, and both its appearance and high-level function have considerable importance to the institution and to all who use it. Even a very minor mechanical defect, like a slightly displaced damper, can make the piano unusable for performance until the defect has been remedied. Methods of marking that seem innocuous, like the use of pencil, blackboard chalk, or masking tape, can leave permanent damage to the finish, or can be difficult to impossible to remove completely. There are also risks of considerably more serious damage associated with carelessly executed extended techniques. Bass strings are particularly vulnerable to damage.

With these things in mind, the following procedures and limitations are suggested to help guide extended uses of pianos.

## **Extended techniques should only be performed on a designated piano after consultation with a piano technician and must follow these guidelines:**

- **The piano technician** must approve all structural changes to any piano. This includes removing the lid or other case parts and attaching anything to strings or soundboard to modify the sound.
- **Touching the strings**  
If the strings will be touched by fingers or hands (harmonics, plucking, rubbing), hands should be washed first. For moderate use of these techniques, a reasonable amount (not too much) of powdered talc may be applied to the hands to help prevent the transfer of oil from skin to the strings. Thin gloves should be worn for extensive contact with the strings.
- **Marking**  
Sticky notepaper, Post-It strips/flags or small dot labels are preferred material to use for marking dampers, agraffes or strings. To mark a string node, a thin (1/8") strip of the adhesive

part of a sticky note or a mailing label can be worked around the string and stuck to itself. Chalk may be used on the plain wire but never on the wound bass strings. Never use masking tape or any other adhesive that may leave a residue. Other than small stickies and chalk, nothing should be applied directly to the strings. This includes whiteout, tape, crayon, stickers, nail polish, etc. The performer is responsible for removing any stickers immediately after any performance.

- **Dampers**

Care must always be used when touching dampers as they are easily damaged or displaced. Sticky notepaper, Post-It strips/flags or small dot labels are preferred material to use for marking dampers. Never use chalk. The performer is responsible for removing any stickers immediately after any performance.

- **Malleable substances on strings**

Bostik Blu-Tack, Scotch Removable Mounting Putty, or like products are the only malleable substances acceptable for direct application to the strings. The piano technician must approve all other substances.

- **Screws and bolts**

In some cases, literature calls for the insertion of screws or other items between piano strings. Proper protocol must be followed when inserting screws. Only use new screws and bolts, or those in like new condition, in the piano. Screws and bolts showing signs of rust or corrosion should never be inserted between the strings. Screws should be carefully selected to fit into the gap between the strings with minimum spreading. Depress the damper pedal while inserting anything between the strings. Go slowly, taking great care not to let the screw come in contact with the soundboard. Only plastic screws/bolts or similar materials softer than metal may be used when inserting between wound strings.

- **Striking and plucking strings**

Strings may be struck or plucked with fingers or guitar pick. Other devices must always be a material that will not mar or scratch strings. On steel strings only materials that are softer than the steel string, such as brass or aluminum, may be used. Copper wound bass strings must be struck or plucked with a material softer than copper (copper is much softer than steel). Acceptable materials might include wood, plastic, rubber and felt mallets. The general rule is that the material should not be harder than the strings. Never use a steel chisel or screwdriver on piano strings (a substitute may be made from brass stock). The piano technician will help any performer in selecting materials that will not damage the piano.

- **Clean up**

The pianist should clean up after performance and leave the piano in the same condition it was found. Nothing should be left in the piano. Do not, however, risk damaging the piano for the sake of clean up. If you need assistance removing something please contact the piano technician.

- **Damage avoidance using sound and prudent judgment**

Most damage to pianos can easily be avoided by using good judgment and knowledge of the piano. Please consult with the piano technician before using extended techniques. If you are composing a piece using extended techniques, consult with the piano technician to ascertain what is safe. Usually alternatives to potentially destructive methods can be found to satisfy both the performer and this policy.